

La Barranca Project Public Hearing

11/10/2003

USFWS Fisheries Office Conference Room
10950 Tyler Road
Red Bluff, California

FLOODPLAIN RECONNECTION AND RESTORATION ON THE LA BARRANCA UNIT, SACRAMENTO RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE PUBLIC HEARING

The public hearing regarding a request to fund flood corridor improvements and wildlife habitat preservation and enhancement on the La Barranca Unit, Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge was called to order at 2:04 PM on Monday, November 10, 2003 at the USFWS Fisheries Office Conference Room in Red Bluff at 10950 Tyler Road.

Dr. Michelle Stevens represented the Department of Water Resources' Division of Flood Management and conducted the public hearing. Michelle reviewed the nature, origin, and authority of the Flood Protection Corridor Program and why the Review Panel chose the La Barranca Project for an award of \$1,220,000.

Kelly Moroney, US Fish and Wildlife Service, gave a brief overview of the history of the La Barranca Unit, Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment elements of the planning phases of this project. Jack Williamson represented the Anadromous Fish Restoration Program and summarized the history of its program and its role in funding the La Barranca Feasibility Study. Dan Efseaff, River Partners, outlined the different phases of the La Barranca Project.

Dr. Stevens opened the meeting for public comment.

Mr. Eldon Harms is a property owner located on the eastern bank of the Sacramento River near Blackberry Island and Craig Creek. Mr. Harms stated that overall he liked the project, but doesn't want to fill the gravel pits up to be leveled and is apprehensive if riprap would be added and affecting the eastern bank. He wants to be notified if the project includes riprapping. Mr. Harms extended an invitation to all stay on his property to get an idea of what neighbors on the east bank would be dealing with.

Mr. Tim Merrill, representing Crain Orchards, was concerned with the levee, which does not hold back floodwaters. Mr. Merrill is concerned that hydraulic flows may affect his property. The presence of trees may cause water to move quickly and potentially damage their farm. Another concern is with the restriction of flows. Mr. Merrill is concerned that as the trees grow larger they will restrict flows and floodwaters will move

to the west and affect his property. Dan Efseaff, River Partners, explained that hydrology would be addressed as a component of the NEPA/CEQA analysis, which will be subject to more public hearings. Project construction will not proceed until all impacts on adjacent landowners are evaluated and minimized.

Mr. Serge Birk is a property owner located across from the La Barranta Unit on the eastern bank of the Sacramento River. Mr. Birk also has extensive professional experience as a fisheries biologist and currently is employed as the Environmental Director with the Central Valley Project water Association (CVPWA). For the last twelve years, he has been actively involved with planning and implementation of CVPIA Anadromous Fish Restoration Program (AFRP), and the CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program. He is the current Co-chairman of the CVPIA Restoration Fund Roundtable and a member of the CALFED ERP and Agency Stakeholder Ecosystem Team (ASET).

Mr. Birk stated that he became aware of the project when the USFWS had informed landowners about the Floodplain Restoration Feasibility Study for the La Barranta Unit prepared by Sacramento River Partners for the USFWS AFRP. The study was described as a first step to:

- Reduce the potential of native fish entrapment (especially salmonids) associated with past gravel mining operations;
- Reestablish the connection between floodplain and the river; and
- Enhance vegetation on there site.

Mr. Birk stated that he was confused about the purpose of this meeting and wanted to get a better idea of the project. His comments seemed focused on the USFWS project and NEPA documentation rather than the FPCP projects. Mr. Birk stated that more information is needed on third party impacts and on fisheries. In particular, he felt the fisheries study in the fisheries section describing benefits to anadromous fish lacked adequate data, assessment and justification. Further, as an AFRP project, Mr. Birk felt the La Barranta project was marginal at best.

Mr. Birk recommended that the NEPA/CEQA analysis focus on fish species that go on site during February and March when floodwaters enter the site. Mr. Birk recommends that project planners ask whether the project truly provides habitat beneficial for fish. He is concerned that the project could be detrimental to fish. He advised that increased technical review was needed, and the process should include stakeholder involvement and independent peer review. Further, he stated that topographical data was not adequate to assess third party impacts to adjacent landowners. In order to be in compliance with federal and state endangered species regulations he recommended early involvement and consultation with appropriate agencies. Dr. Stevens commented that DWR appreciates having his valuable expertise and would utilize his input and participation as much as possible. Mr. Kelly Moroney, USFWS, mentioned that a hydrology and hydraulics analysis, fisheries analysis and endangered species analysis would be included in the NEPA process, along with extensive public outreach and notification. Mr. Birk urged the project partners to evaluate the big picture; he was

particularly concerned that AFRP funded small projects and didn't look at the larger context for overall fisheries benefit. Mr. Birk also said that the feasibility study will need to include a risk assessment. He said that there is a need to think about how the river is going to change after restoration and to evaluate potential impacts to property owners on the east bank. In closing, Mr. Birk was concerned that public funds were being obligated for the project prior to completion of NEPA/CEQA and the public has been provided little information as to the description and cost of the proposal.

Mr. Tim Merrill asked if River Partners could start work with the 1.2 million dollars. He was concerned that removal of the levees will increase flood flows to their adjacent properties and result in third party impacts. Mr. Merrill recommended that the hydrologic study evaluate the effect of trees on moving floodwaters to the west. Dr. Stevens and Ms. Annalena Bronson stated that there are different phases to the project fund allocation. Before any project can be initiated, there is a requirement under Water Code Section 79041 to develop a plan to minimize impacts to adjacent landowners. The NEPA/ CEQA environmental assessment is just now being initiated. A hydrologic and hydraulic analysis will be completed as a component of the environmental assessment, with associated public review. Restoration project construction will not be initiated until the hydrologic and environmental analysis is completed, environmental permits are obtained, and third party impacts are identified and mitigated.

Ms. Sharon Wallace was concerned about the Sacramento River Conservation Area Forum (SRCAF) input. Dan Efseaff, River Partners, stated that he has brought this project to the SRCAF Technical Advisory Meetings. Ms. Wallace asked where the high water mark is behind the levee. Changes will be made with the removal of the levee and hydraulic effects thus need to be re-evaluated. She suggested a site visit and a copy of the hydraulic model at the next meeting.

Mr. Todd Hillaire, Department of Water Resources-Northern District, mentioned that it is important to determine how the project will impact the 100-year flood zone, which may impact people's need for flood insurance and/or their rates. The entire project is located within an unnumbered 'A' zone as delineated on the Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) for the Sacramento River below Red Bluff. The 'A' zone delineation was determined by approximate methods and shows the 100-year floodplain delineation without base flood elevations.. If the project changes the delineation of the FEMA 100-year flood floodplain, a Letter of Map Revision (LOMR) will need to be filed based on changes in the floodplain delineation. If the project occurs over a multi-year period, a Conditional Letter of Map Revision will need to be filed prior at the start of project construction.

Mr. John Carlon, President of River Partners, stated that this was a good opportunity to meet and get feedback on project concerns prior to doing any work.

Dr. Michelle Stevens ended the hearing at 4:15 PM.